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KETURI - A register of hazardous chemicals available in Finland

by
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Tampere

KETURI – A Register of Hazardous Chemicals Available In Finland

Summary

Finnish manufacturers and importers of hazardous chemicals have delivered over 50 000 Material Safety Data Sheets to the National Board of Labour Protection. The data from the Material Safety Data Sheets are entered into a computer register, for use by Labour Protection and other authorities. The register can be searched for information on the properties of chemical products and can assist the enforcement of regulations. Various statistics and reports can be prepared with the aid of the register. For example, the data on chemical products can be outputted by hazard class. The register also allows information about specific chemicals to be directed to the manufacturers and importers concerned. △

What is KETURI ?

Section 40a of the Industrial Safety Act (299/58) prescribes that the manufacturer, importer or other supplier of a dangerous chemical is responsible for providing the receiver of the chemical with the necessary safety information.

The Act was further specified by a Cabinet Decision (286/78) concerning an identification and marking system for dangerous substances, which deals with the duty of the manufacturer or importer to draw up a data sheet concerning the safety of dangerous substances and products. This material safety data sheet is to be delivered to the receiver of the product, while copies of it are forwarded to the National Board of Labor Protection.

Fig. 1 shows an example of a material safety data sheet.

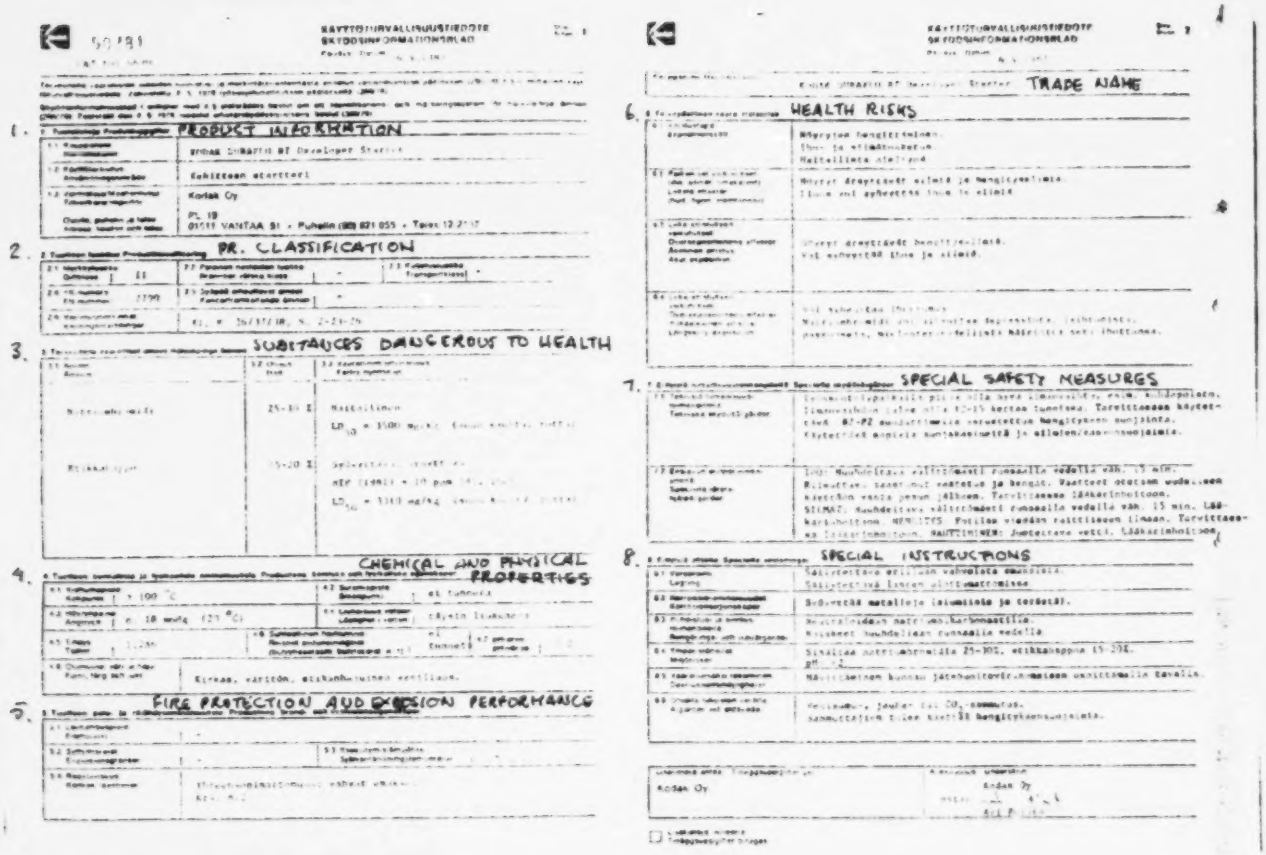

Fig. 1 An example of the material safety data sheet

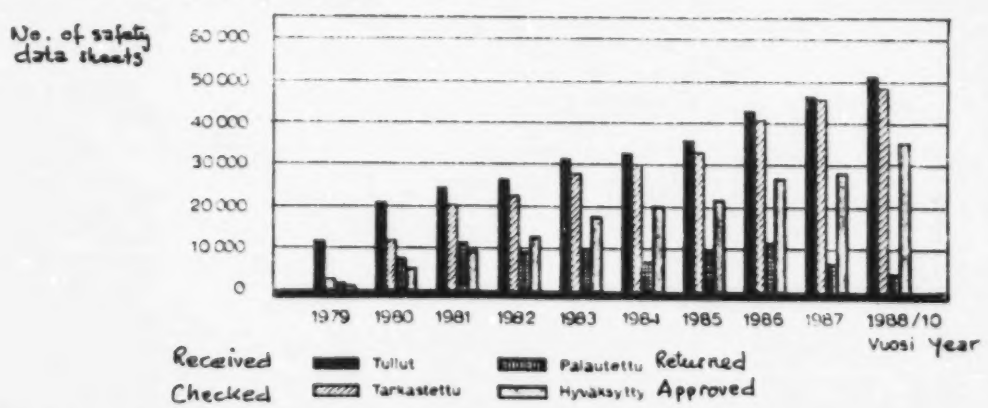

Fig. 2 Material safety sheets by processing stages, 1979-1988

The data contained by the sheets forwarded to the Labor Protection Board are entered into a computerized register, which is called "the chemical product safety data register" (in abbreviated form **KETURI**). The data are entered in two stages. First, the data from Section 1 of the sheet are entered: date, trade name, use, name of (Finnish) manufacturer/importer, and also, the number the Labor Protection Board has given the data sheet in question.

The data contained in Section 1 of the data sheet thus constitute a reference data base, which will make it possible to look up more detailed information about a product by means of manual archives consisting of the material safety data sheets.

The data in Section 1 of the data sheet are updated by direct editing of the data base. As for the Section-1 data of the safety sheets, the data base is in real time, so that it can be used to find out whether the Labor Protection Board has received a material safety data sheet for a product sold under a given tradename.

In the second stage, the data from Section 2 and the rest of the sections are entered into the Register. The data can be stored after the contents of the safety data sheets are checked and found pertinent. If deficiencies are found in the way a sheet is filled in, it is returned to the preparer for correction, and in this case, the data in the latter part of the sheet are not stored.

The contents of Section 2 of the safety data sheets are combined with those of Section 1 in the Register by means of the sheet identification numbers by batch

processing about twice a year.

The storing of the Section-2 data is presently delayed due to insufficient personnel. At the moment, there is a backlog of about 8000 material safety data sheets.

Information contents of KETURI

Table 1 shows the information contents of the Register, as they were in October 1988.

Table 1

	Quantity
1st sections of safety data sheets	47 500
Entire safety data sheets	20 980

The number of the safety data sheets has grown fairly evenly, at a yearly rate of 2000-5000. Fig. 2 is a statistical representation of sheet quantities, by processing stage and year.

The data stored includes also a code denoting the processing stage and the date of each stage for every safety data sheet.

The codes denoting the processing stages and the current phases of the data

sheets are as follows:

St:1 Contents of data sheet are found pertinent

St:2 Sheet is returned to preparer for correction (a date combined with the code shows when the corrected sheet is to be returned to the Labor Protection Board)

St:3 Product is no longer sold, sales are transferred to another importer or manufacturer, or manufacturer or importer is no longer active

St:4 Material safety data sheet is drawn up for harmless product

St:5 Danger level of product is not known

St:6 Corrected data sheet has been returned to the Labor Protection Board but not checked yet

St:7 Danger level of product can not be assessed due to deficiencies in information submitted

To keep the data in the Register up to date, outputs have been sent to manufacturers and importers for checking. Their responses have shown that the Register contains almost 10 000 products which are no longer sold or have been transferred to other manufacturers or importers. About a third of the products seem to disappear from the market within a very short time.

Some safety data sheets have been fully removed from the Register, if very many changes have taken place in the information contained by them. Thus, about 3800 safety data sheets have been subject to removal of data from the Register.

The safety data sheets also contain information about caution signs and

classification of products. Fig. 3 shows the danger class distribution of the registered safety data sheets by their danger symbols.

Some chemicals belong to several different danger classes. Fig. 4 shows a classification of chemicals on the basis of danger class information, in view of both physical dangers and health dangers of a product.

About a third of the registered products contain such small amounts of dangerous substances that no caution signs are needed on the package. However, the safety data sheet mentions dangerous constituents with lower contents than those requiring caution labels on the package. This has been considered necessary in view of occupational use of chemicals.

A separate register is maintained for names and addresses of manufacturers and importers. At present, the registered manufacturers and importers number 1026.

How to use KETURI

KETURI requires a storage and search software named MINTTU, which was designed by the Government Computer Centre. The software is based on the principle that each document constitutes a unit that can be searched by means of character strings. In the KETURI Register, a document is a safety data sheet, which can be searched by using any word or character string appearing in it. The character string can not, however, consist of just one character or a purely numeric character set.

In MINTTU, a search word can be abbreviated from the end.

When the Register is searched, the search can be directed at given items of the safety data sheet. The items have been coded with block marks.

The contents of the safety data sheets are entered into the Register in the form in which they have been given to the Labor Protection Board. This lack of standardization makes searches difficult and forces the operator to stretch his imagination to come up with as many different search codes as possible.

When the system is searched for data, the number of the safety data sheets fulfilling the search condition appears first. Delimitation of the search can be done by AND and NOT commands.

The Register has been outputted also in microfiche form in an alphabetical order based on the tradenames.

Publicity of KETURI

In accordance with the Act (83/51) on Free Access to Public Documents, a material safety data sheet forwarded to the Labor Protection Board is to be considered a public document. The data sheet is a public document, because it generally contains no professional or business secrets, since all purchasers of the product are entitled to receive a sheet. Every Finnish citizen is entitled to have a

copy of a public document.

However, a material safety data sheet register compiled by the Labor Protection Board can, in accordance with the Act mentioned, be considered an account prepared by public authorities, and making it public is within their discretion. Thus, a public official is under no obligation to provide information about the Register to a requester.

The Labor Protection Board has issued instructions for the use and maintenance of the KETURI Register, stating that a right to use the Register can be obtained by applying to the Labor Protection Board. The right can be given to other public authorities, and institutes conducting medical or labor safety research.

The above restrictions concerning the use of the Register are considered desirable especially by manufacturers and importers of chemicals, who fear exploitation of the obtainable information in a competitive situation.
Similar arguments against making the product register public have been presented in Denmark, where authorities concluded that the part of the register known as public product information could be used publicly. It is very much possible that Finland also has to return to the publicity question at a later time.

At present, the Register has several tens of users outside the Labor Protection Board. Some of them use the Register through a terminal and some through microfiches.

What is KETURI used for ?

The KETURI Register was originally intended to be used by the Labor Protection Board. However, it proved useful for other public authorities and research institutes as well.

Without a computerized register, it would not be possible to sort, file, and use the numerous safety data sheets received by the Labor Protection Board. A majority of the Register-related work of the Occupational Hygiene Branch of the Labor Safety Board consists of daily routines. The chemists resort to the Register when they answer telephone calls concerning a chemical product or its constituents. The information-seekers include employees of different work places and labor protection delegates who wish to know whether the information on a safety data sheet is pertinent. Inquiries are received also from occupational health service officials and labor protection managers. The inquiries may relate to whether a safety data sheet exists, or whether a chemical has dangerous effects, composition, etc. Very many representatives of importers and manufacturers wish to make sure of the correctness of chemical classification and other information by comparing data about their own chemical with those already in the Register.

The Register is used as an instrument of labor protection supervision. Also, labor protection districts have access to a terminal. The Labor Protection Board has been using the Register for product group -specific chemical control. Among other things, the Board has carried out a study on organic dyes, in which

the Register was used for selecting names of products which could be suspected, on the basis of the literature, to contain impurities with cancer risk. The manufacturers and importers were asked to check the data in the safety data sheets in question with special attention to cancer risk.

Other product group -specific surveys have been carried out as well, such as those of wood preservation agents and chemical control agents.

Further, the Register makes it possible to find out quickly and easily whether a manufacturer or importer has complied with the duty to prepare and forward a data sheet as prescribed in the law. The Labor Protection Board has conducted various rather extensive searches for example to find out the number of chemicals that would become subject to a new rule or regulation under preparation. An example of this is a list that was prepared for cancer risk assessment of products containing toluene diisocyanate.

The Register allows information about chemicals to be directed, when required, to manufacturers and importers. The possibilities of doing this have been limited up to now, due to a lack of resources. However, when manufacturers and importers are requested to check the up-to-dateness of registered data, they receive a notification about amendments to regulations in the same letter.

Users outside the Labor Protection Board are assumed to use the Register as an information source in various tasks. Regional warning centres constitute a very important user group, who, however, at present have access only to the microfiche form of the Register.

Development of KETURI

According to the Chemical Bill under reading in Parliament, the duty to draw up material safety data sheets would in the future apply also to dangerous chemicals sold to consumers and, at a date to be fixed later, to environmentally dangerous chemicals.

The chemical act would mean that the safety data sheet would become a chemical registration notification directly addressed to the Labor Protection Board, which then would enter the information from it into the chemical register.

Also, the chemical act would obligate the manufacturer and importer to forward a safety data sheet to the Labor Protection Board for a check before the chemical is put on the market or taken into use.

The act would further give a public authority a possibility of collecting fees to cover e.g. the costs of processing safety data sheets.

It is planned that a minor fee would be collected from those submitting a data sheet, to cover the checking and registration costs.

Importance of KETURI

To assess the danger caused by a chemical, it is necessary to know its dangerous

properties and the level of these properties as well as the related exposure level and risk, and to assess the risk, it is necessary to know the chemical's dangerous properties and its exposure level.

The KETURI Register contains extensive data about the dangerous properties of chemicals, product by product. Only a few data bases exist globally, where information about chemicals can be obtained by trade names. The information contained in KETURI is available to all public authorities, and every one has access to the Register for information about a single product. The KETURI Register offers excellent basic information about the properties of chemical products for the purpose of assessing the risks related to their use.

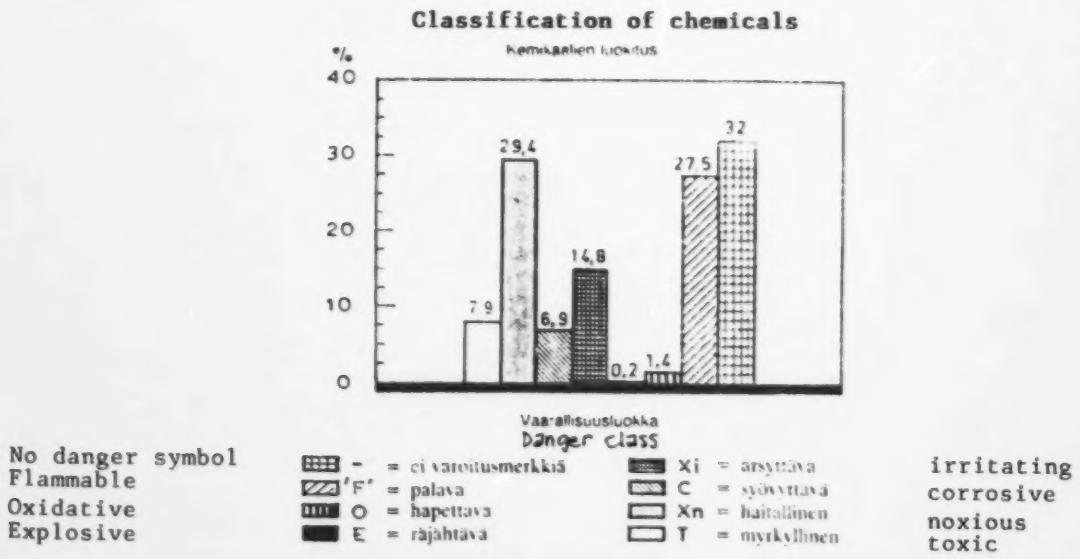

Fig. 3 Classification of registered chemicals by danger class

KETURI: Substances dangerous to health
and other dangerous substances

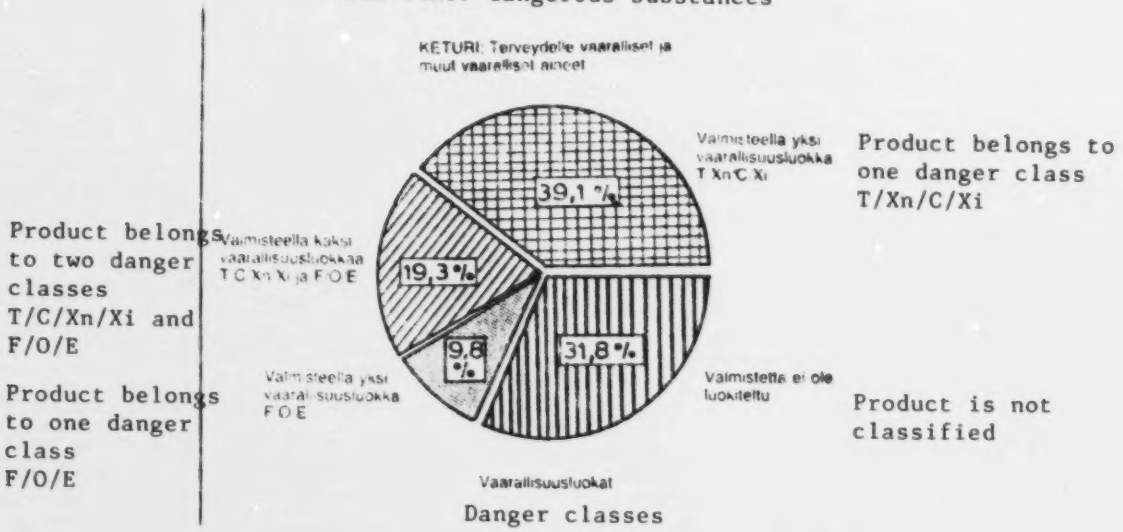

Fig. 4 Classification of registered products with regard to two dangerous properties